"Well, my dear," said the old lady, taking in the situation instanly, "I must say that I admire those ornaments upon your mantel greatly. I fear my own poor efforts to please you and George must have been singularly unsuccessful—" And then she stopped. For Lucy had run into her bedroom when the old lady was announced to get the china vase; but she had not had time to place it upon the mantel and stood guiltily hiding it beneath her apron.

"You may tell George," she continued, "that since he has seen fit to quarrel with me, who always supposed that he cared for me—since my endeavors to make his home happy and beautiful are so unappreciated, I shall waste no further time on him. And, incidentally, I shall bestow my money where it will be likely to promote greater service."

And with these words she stalked out of the apartment, leaving Lucy in tears.

She told George of the happening when he returned from his studio.

"Give me that infernal vase," he shouted. "I'm going to break it to pieces and send her the fragments by parcel post. Old tyrant! Does she thing she is going to doom us to a life of artistic misery?"

But Lucy hid the vase from him.

"You know, dear," she said, "Aunt Mary will take you back into favor again if only you give her time to forget. She is very fond of you really."

"She wanted to see how far she could go," said George Strang gloomily. "It was a test. She couldn't really have liked that vase. Well, let her do her worst.

And Aunt Mary did her worst speedily, for she took it into her crabbed old mind to have a sudden seizure a week later and die. But she had had time to carry her threat into effect.

"To my nephew George," the will read, "I had intended to leave the bulk of my property. But inasmuch as his love for me could not survive a little trial that I made of it, I bequeath to him instead the china vase which is now in his wife's possession."

Yet, after all, it seemed that Aunt Mary had had singularly little to leave. For what she did leave to her dozen nephews and nieces amounted to exactly ninety-seven dollars and eighteen cents apiece.

"George," said Lucy, in tears, when they got home from the funeral, "if Aunt Mary has any knowledge of what is happening now, don't you think it would please her if we kept the vase on our mantel after all?"

"I tell you what we'll do," said George. "We'll put it on the mantel each anniversary of her death as a peace offering. The rest of the year please keep it out of my sight."

"Yes, dear," said Lucy. "Suppose we keep it there just for today, to show we have no hard feeling."

She brought it out of its place of concealment and deposited it beside the Pompeiian jars. George looked at it—then suddenly, overcome by passion, he dashed it to the floor. The vase broke into a thousand pieces.

"George!" exclaimed his wife wretchedly. "How could you have the heart to do that? Dear Aunt Mary! Why—there's paper inside!"

There was indeed, for the vase was hollow, and on the floor lay a long, thin, folded package.

"Bills!" shouted George Strang, as he unfolded it. And he shook out, one after another, nine bills of the value of a thousand dollars apiece.

"Look! There's a letter!" said Lucy Strang, picking up a piece of paper covered with Aunt Mary's queer, crabbed hieroglyphics.

"My dear, hot-headed nephew," George read aloud. "Forgive a cranky old woman who loves you with all her heart. I know how you will hate this vase. If you are hypocrite enough to keep it, or unkind enough to give it away, you will never read this note.